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HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS FIND THEIR VOICE THROUGH POETRY OUT LOUD & VIE FOR OPPORTUNITY TO WIN \$20,000 SCHOLARSHIP AT NATIONAL FINALS IN WASHINGTON, DC

For the third year, students from across the country will convene in Washington, DC for the chance to win a \$20,000 scholarship prize based on their superior ability – not to shoot hoops or hit home runs – but to recite poetry. *Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest*, a program that encourages high school students to learn about great poetry through memorization and performance, is the creation of the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) and the Poetry Foundation. On April 28 and 29, 52 high school students from every state, the District of Columbia, and the U.S. Virgin Islands will gather at George Washington University Lisner Auditorium in Washington, DC, to match their skills. These students are among more than 150,000 students nationwide who took part in this year's contest at the classroom level, progressing through school and state contests en route to becoming their state's champion. Special guest judges at the *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals are attorney, author, and advocate Caroline Kennedy, radio personality and novelist Garrison Keillor, Pulitzer-Prize-winning poet Natasha Trethewey, *Daily Poetry* editor Don Selby, 2007 *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion Amanda Fernandez, and memoirist, activist, and poet Luis Rodriguez. Scott Simon of National Public Radio returns to serve as master of ceremonies.

For the last three years, The Alabama State Council on the Arts has hosted *Poetry Out Loud*, a national poetry recitation contest, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts and the Poetry Foundation. This year's activities began in October 2007, when high schools throughout the river region were invited to participate in the program. All high schools, both public and private, in the state were invited to compete in the event. On March 14th, seven students were selected to compete in the state finals.

After a full day of competition at the state level, the winner selected was a student of Ms. Lori Seawright, a 12th grade teacher at Taylor Road Academy, in Montgomery. Rosanna Marie Smith, a senior at Taylor Road Academy, won the competition with her dramatic presentations of *One Perfect Rose* by Dorothy Parker, *On Virtue* by Phillis Wheatley and *Beauty* by Tony Hoagland. Ms. Smith, and one chaperon, will now travel to Washington DC to compete against 51 other high school winners on April 28th and 29th.

During the competition, Sohaila Elizabeth Nikoufar, an 11th grade student at Loveless Academic Magnet High School was honored with the best original poem, *Bones*. Her teacher is Diann Frucci.

The Original Poetry Competition runs at the state level only and is Alabama's contribution to the creativity of young people. Arts in education program manager at the Alabama State Council on the Arts, Diana Green states, "The Poetry Out Loud program, as a national initiative, does an incredible job of bringing an interest in classical and contemporary poetry back to the classroom. We wanted to take that one step further, and encourage Alabama

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“Through *Poetry Out Loud*, thousands of students have discovered the rewards of memorizing a favorite poem and the thrill of connecting with an audience,” said NEA Chairman Dana Gioia. “This experience not only teaches them about literature, it also builds self-assurance and the practical skills that students will use every day in the workplace and in the community.”

Poetry Out Loud seeks to foster the next generation of literary readers by building on the resurgence of poetry as an oral art form, as seen in the slam poetry movement and the popularity of rap music. Through *Poetry Out Loud*, students master public speaking skills, build self-confidence, and learn about their literary heritage. The contest also seeks to address decreasing reading rates among young people, as cited in a recent NEA study *To Read or Not To Read: A Question of National Consequence*. Now in its third year of national competition, *Poetry Out Loud* has inspired hundreds of thousands of high school students to discover classic and contemporary poetry.

“To learn a great poem by heart is to make a friend for life,” said John Barr, president of the Poetry Foundation. “The national recitation program brings fresh energy to an ancient art form by returning it to the classrooms of America.”

The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will take place on April 28 and 29 during the final days of National Poetry Month. On April 28, students grouped in three geographic regions will compete in semifinal competitions. Twelve students (four from each region) will advance to compete in the National Finals on April 29. Judges will evaluate each student performance on criteria including physical presence, articulation, evidence of understanding, level of difficulty, and accuracy. Students choose three poems to recite from the *Poetry Out Loud* print and online anthologies (www.poetryoutloud.org). Some of the poems that have helped bring state winners to the National Finals are “The Meaning of the Shovel” by Martín Espada, and “Time Does Not Bring Relief: You All Have Lied” by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

Poetry Out Loud Partnerships

The National Finals are the culmination of efforts by many partners. As national partners, the NEA and the Poetry Foundation have contributed support for administration of the program, educational materials, and prizes for both the state and national finals. State Arts Agencies implemented the program in high schools in each state and organized state competitions, often in collaboration with local arts organizations. The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will be administered by the Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation.

Poetry Out Loud Educational Materials

The NEA and the Poetry Foundation provided free, standards-based curriculum materials for use by participating schools. These materials include print and online poetry anthologies containing more than 500 classic and contemporary poems, a teacher’s guide, and a CD about the art of recitation featuring well-known actors and writers such as Anthony Hopkins, James Earl Jones, Alyssa Milano, and N. Scott Momaday. Schools that are not part of the official *Poetry Out Loud* competition are welcome to conduct their own contests using the online resources at www.poetryoutloud.org.

Contests and Prizes

Poetry Out Loud uses a pyramid structure. Between September 2007 and February 2008, teachers at schools across the country introduced students to the poems and educational resources, later conducting classroom and schoolwide competitions. State contests were held in February and March; those champions advance to the

National Finals in Washington, DC. 2008 marks expansion for *Poetry Out Loud* on several fronts. This year, the U.S. Virgin Islands has joined the nationwide competition. State programs across the country have expanded geographically, reaching new schools and students. Since last year's contest, the number of schools in the official contest has increased by 30 percent to more than 1,500 schools in 2008. An estimated 150,000 students have participated in the 2007-2008 *Poetry Out Loud* competition.

The *Poetry Out Loud* National Finals will award a total of \$50,000 in scholarship prizes and school stipends for the purchase of poetry books. Prizes include \$20,000 for the *Poetry Out Loud* National Champion, and \$10,000 and \$5,000 for the second- and third-place finalists. Each state-level final has awarded \$1,000 in cash prizes to the champion, runner up, and their schools. In total, *Poetry Out Loud* will award more than \$100,000 to state- and national-level winners.

National Finals at the Lisner Auditorium

The 52 champions will gather at the *Poetry Out Loud* semifinals on Monday, April 28, from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm at the Lisner Auditorium, George Washington University, 730 21st Street, NW, Washington, DC. Twelve finalists will advance to the National Finals, also held at the Lisner on Tuesday, April 29, from 7:00 to 10:00 pm. Both events are free and open to the public; no tickets or reservations are required. For more information on the competitions, call 202-682-5772.

About Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation

Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation supports the richness and diversity of the region's arts resources and promotes wider access to the art and artists of the region, nation and world. To learn more about MAAF, its programs and services, visit www.midatlanticarts.org.

About the Poetry Foundation

The Poetry Foundation, publisher of *Poetry* magazine and one of the largest literary organizations in the world, exists to discover and celebrate the best poetry and to place it before the largest possible audience. The Poetry Foundation seeks to be a leader in shaping a receptive climate for poetry by developing new audiences, creating new avenues for delivery, and encouraging new kinds of poetry through innovative literary prizes and programs. For more information, please visit www.poetryfoundation.org.

About the National Endowment for the Arts

The National Endowment for the Arts is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts, both new and established; bringing the arts to all Americans; and providing leadership in arts education. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the Arts Endowment is the largest national funder of the arts, bringing great art to all 50 states, including rural areas, inner cities, and military bases.

About Alabama State Council on the Arts

The mission of the Alabama State Council on the Arts is to promote Alabama's diverse and rich artistic resources while highlighting excellence and educational experiences. The Council is the official agency for the support and development of the arts in Alabama. It was established in 1966 by an act of the Alabama Legislature. The goal of the Arts in Education program is to provide opportunities for Alabama students to learn in, through and about the arts, ensuring arts as an integral and essential component of education in the State of Alabama.

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